

## CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method for automatically saving instant messaging transcripts to a searchable repository connected by the Internet to a plurality of computers comprising:
  - specifying a topic;
  - attaching a topic tag corresponding to the topic to a segment of an instant messaging transcript as a topic tag metadata; and
  - saving the segment to the searchable repository.
2. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
  - specifying an identifier; and
  - attaching the identifier to an instant message transcript as an identifier metadata.
3. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
  - searching the repository for the topic tag; and
  - responsive to finding the topic tag, displaying the segment.
4. The method of claim 2 further comprising:
  - scanning instant messaging transcripts in the repository for a segment with the identifier metadata;
  - responsive to finding a segment with the identifier metadata, sending a notification to an addressee on an alert notification list.

5. The method of claim 2 further comprising:
  - scanning instant messaging transcripts in the repository for a segment with the identifier metadata;
  - responsive to finding a segment with the identifier metadata, exporting the segment to a pre-designated addressee.
6. The method of claim 3 further comprising:
  - scanning instant messaging transcripts in the repository for a segment with the topic tag metadata;
  - responsive to finding a segment with the topic tag metadata, sending a notification to an addressee on an alert notification list.
7. The method of claim 3 further comprising:
  - scanning instant messaging transcripts in the repository for a segment with the topic tag metadata;
  - responsive to finding a segment with the topic tag metadata, exporting the segment to a pre-designated addressee.
8. The method of claim 1 wherein the searchable repository is on a client computer.
9. The method of claim 1 wherein the searchable repository is on a server computer.
10. The method of claim 2 wherein the identifier comprises user characteristics.

11. The method of claim 2 wherein the identifier comprises user characteristics.
12. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
  - specifying that all instant message transcripts will be saved; and
  - providing for an automatic saving of all instant messaging transcripts to the repository.
13. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
  - specifying that instant message transcripts will be saved according to a selection criteria; and
  - providing for an automatic saving of all instant messaging transcripts meeting the criteria.
14. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
  - determining whether a turn has occurred; and
  - responsive to determining whether a turn has occurred, determining whether a topic shift has occurred.
15. The method of claim 12 further comprising:
  - responsive to determining that a topic shift has occurred, identifying a new topic;and

attaching the new topic marker to a topic segment corresponding to the chat transcript following the new topic marker.

16. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

displaying a prompt asking a user to identify a topic.

17. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

displaying a list of available pre-designated topics for user selection.

18. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

presenting a topic tag to a user for review; and

responsive to the user reviewing the topic tag, distinguishing the topic tag.

19. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

presenting a topic tag to a user for review; and

responsive to the user reviewing the topic tag, accepting the topic tag.

20. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

presenting a topic tag to a user for review; and

responsive to the user reviewing the topic tag, and the user failing to distinguish the topic tag or to accept the topic tag, entering a default topic tag.

21. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

displaying the search results to the user; and  
obtaining a feedback regarding the search from the user.

22. The method of claim 1 wherein the steps of specifying a topic and attaching a topic tag corresponding to the topic to a segment of an instant messaging transcript as a topic tag metadata, are performed automatically by a computer.

23. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of specifying a topic may take place retrospectively after completion of an instant messaging transcript.

24. A method comprising:

storing a structured instant message transcript in a repository on a server computer connected to the Internet; and

using a filter in a program on a remote computer, searching the repository for a metadata attached to a segment of the structured instant message.

25. The method of claim 24 further comprising:

responsive to finding the metadata, displaying an instant message transcript segment corresponding to the topic tag.

26. The method of claim 24 further comprising:

responsive to finding the metadata, sending a notification to an addressee on an alert notification list.

27. The method of claim 24 further comprising:

responsive to finding the metadata, exporting the segment to a pre-designated addressee.

28. The method of claim 24 further comprising:

specifying that instant message transcripts will be saved according to a selection criteria; and

providing for an automatic saving of all instant messaging transcripts meeting the criteria.

29. The method of claim 24 further comprising:

determining whether a turn has occurred; and

responsive to determining whether a turn has occurred, determining whether a topic shift has occurred;

responsive to determining that a topic shift has occurred, identifying a new metadata; and

attaching the new metadata to a second segment.

30. A program product operable on a computer comprising:

a computer-usable medium;

wherein the computer usable medium comprises instructions for a computer to perform steps comprising:

prompting a user to specify a topic;

attaching a topic tag corresponding to the topic to a segment of an instant messaging transcript as a topic tag metadata; and

saving the segment to a searchable repository connected to the computer-usable medium by the Internet.

31. The program product of claim 30 wherein the step of prompting a user to specify a topic is replaced with selecting an automatic process so that the step of attaching a topic tag corresponding to the topic to a segment of an instant messaging transcript as a topic tag metadata is performed automatically by the computer following instructions from the computer-usable medium.

32. The program product of claim 30 wherein the step of prompting the user to specify a topic is replaced with the step of selecting retrospective identification of a topic, and responsive to selecting retrospective identification of a topic, retrospectively identifying a topic upon completion of an instant messaging transcript.

33. A system for saving instant message transcripts comprising:

- a first computer having a first memory and a first processor;
- a second computer having a second memory and a second processor connected to the first computer;
- a repository connected to the first computer and the second computer;

a first instruction in the memory of the first computer to cause the processor to prompt a user to specify a topic for a chat;

responsive to the user specifying a topic for the chat, a second instruction in the memory of the first computer to cause the processor to attach a topic tag corresponding to the topic to a segment of an instant messaging transcript as a topic tag metadata;

a third instruction to save the segment to the searchable repository

34, The program product of claim 33 wherein the first instruction is replaced with a fourth instruction for prompting the user to select an automatic process, and responsive to the user selecting an automatic process, a fifth instruction to cause the processor to automatically create a topic tag metadata and attach the topic tag metadata to an instant messaging transcript segment.

35. The program product of claim 33 wherein the first instruction is replaced with a sixth instruction to prompt the user to select retrospective identification of a topic, and responsive to the user selecting retrospective identification of a topic, a seventh instruction to prompt the user to retrospectively identify a topic upon completion of an instant messaging transcript segment.